Vajrayana's Final Hour

A Teaching from Jetsunma Ahkön Lhamo

One of the bits of information that has come out during the course of time is that cyclic existence is just that -- it moves in cycles. There is a cycle during which the Buddha first appears, which is very expansive. During such a time, life is in some ways much simpler and much easier, particularly for attaining enlightenment. The fabric of our mindstreams is much more expansive due to the virtue of the Buddha's appearance.

Then there is an intermediate time in which the Buddha has left, the Teachings are very strong, and are carried on by those who can remember the teachings, who have memorized them and can repeat them verbatim. The Teachings are taught in an unbroken lineage by those who have practiced the Teachings and achieved some result, but there is no true memory of anyone who actually has seen the historical Buddha, or even seen the Buddha's disciples.

Now we find ourselves in a time that is considered to be a degenerate time. The fabric of cause and effect relationships, which includes the very fabric of our own mindstreams, is extremely contracted. Now it is much more difficult to achieve realization. One must work very hard at it. One has to take teachings, accumulate many repetitions of mantra and prayer, and accomplish puja. One must practice devotion to the highest degree, and accomplish Bodhicitta, the Great Compassion. One must renounce ordinary existence, whether as a monk or nun, or in a more internal way from the heart, being stable and unmovable in the mind.

Even though it is hard now, in another way enlightenment can be accomplished more surely and certainly than before, because in this time of degeneration when the content of our mindstream is extremely condensed and contracted, karma actually ripens very quickly. You may have noticed that. If you are kind and loving and if you practice the Bodhicitta toward other sentient beings, it will make you happy. And conversely, if you are unkind, selfish, angry, that too will come right back at you. Hasn't this happened to you? You can be very unkind to someone, and in the same day you can see it come right back in your face. Your nose gets rubbed in it.

The good news in this is that the benefit of the practice comes back much more quickly as well. If one practices really intently and with fervent devotion (devotion is the key here), one can eat the fruit of one's practice. If not during the course of one's life, then at the time of one's death, when the Buddha Nature reveals itself to us as the elements dissolve, one will perceive that Buddha Nature as the display of the deity and recognize that Nature accordingly. Having recognized that Nature, one will awaken.

The tradition we practice here is called Vajrayana. This particular kind of teaching most greatly benefits people who are born in this degenerate aeon. There is something about Vajrayana that seems to burn the candle at both ends. When one practices generation stage practice for example, one does not suppress the compulsion to consider oneself a "self' or ego but rather uses that inclination. There is an energy associated with clinging to oneself as an ego that is a lot like a rubber band. You can try to think of something else, but however much you stretch it, it will always come back to its original shape. That compulsion to consider self nature as being inherently real is similar to the energy that causes a rubber band to reform; we have that energy instinctively within our minds.

Vajrayana actually uses that inclination in generation stage practice. There we meditate on Emptiness, on the natural uncontrived primordial state of Emptiness. We consider that all elements of perceptual phenomena are broken into their natural component: sheer luminosity.

Meditating on Emptiness or Shunyata, we then generate the deity using that same energy that causes us to consider self nature. Generating ourselves as the deity, we generate the pure display having all the pure qualities of the deity. Arising from Emptiness, we generate the Pristine Nature in such a way as to be a phenomenal thing, a display. It is visible to our eyes and our consciousness. We use the very energy that causes us to cling to self nature to accomplish realization. Vajrayana has that unique quality. Can you see how it burns the candle at both ends? We use what we have -- that fire, that passion, even desire, to accomplish the Primordial Wisdom Nature.

In this time of degeneration, I am taught that there will come a time when there is no teaching in the world that can bring us to enlightenment. There will be no path, no Bodhisattvas that incarnate, and the Buddha will not be present in the world. It will be a time of great darkness and wars. And finally there will be a time of night, of darkness. Immediately after that the next Buddha will appear again.

Now while things are becoming darker and more condensed, one still has a shot. Things are lining up so that if one were to sincerely practice a technology that can lead to enlightenment and that has brought others repeatedly to enlightenment, if one were to practice that with fervent regard, devotion, and faith in a pristine way, then one could achieve the auspicious result -- realization during the course of this lifetime, or in the Bardo, or an auspicious rebirth in order to practice purely and perfectly.

How amazing it is to have everything line up: to come to the path, to have a teacher that you can relate to, a teacher who can give you the path and provide the necessary components of the path and its blessings; to have a path that can bring the auspicious result. We would all be fools not to take full advantage. In this time when it is almost too late, this is the time when we should take advantage. There is no better time than this, particularly to meet with this Vajrayana path which has some specific element that is meant for this time.

How many times have you found yourself during the course of your life being faced with some bountiful feast and you take the posture of being a peasant who takes only the crumbs of that feast? You missed out because you did not know how to take hold. You found yourself dancing on the sidelines, holding back.

Isn't that what's happening now? Aren't we in the midst of a bountiful feast, holding a precious jewel that takes endless lifetimes to find, and we just don't know what to do. We sort of look around. We can't help ourselves.

So take hold of it, use it. You're standing at the threshold of the door of liberation, looking at the very mind of liberation, the face of Guru Rinpoche. Every day Guru Rinpoche is touching your life; Lord Buddha is touching your life. That Nature is revealed to you, but you cannot see it because you have the habit of being a beggar at a feast. You have to stop that now. Sit at the table like the king or queen that your are and eat the feast. It doesn't get any better than this, or any easier. Take advantage of it.

When I say something like this to you it is with concern for the well-being of sentient beings, and for you. Accomplish ultimate compassion by becoming Bodhisattvas or Buddhas so that you can return again and again for the others. I and other lamas cannot find the way to speak to the others that do not have the karma to hear about the Path. But someday you will. In some future life those that you have karma with will come to that moment and you will be their only hope. They will have hopes of you. Will you be ready, or will you have missed the brass ring? I'm trying to make you hear this for their sake. Begin now before it's too late.

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